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Khanh Rallies Forces Against Rebels

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Saigon, Feb. 19—Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh, South Viet Nam's strong man, called on loyal troops tonight to march on Saigon and drive out rebels who seized the capital in a bloodless midday coup today.

Khanh was safe at Cap St. Jacques, a seaside resort south of here—a sharp setback for the rebels, who had asserted he was under arrest in Saigon.

Brig. Gen. Nguyen Cao Ky, chief of the air force, rejected rebel overtures and threw his support to Khanh. He warned rebel leaders Brig. Gen. Lan Van Phat and Col. Pham Ngoc Thao to evacuate Tan Son Nhut air base or face bombing.

If Khanh can also get the support of Brig. Gen. Nguyen Chanh Thi, head of troops in upper South Viet Nam, he could break the back of the revolt, which began here at 1 P.M. (midnight Thursday, New York time) when rebels seized the international airport, the Saigon radio and armed forces headquarters. They broadcast a 10-point proclamation and ordered civil servants to stay on their jobs.

The proclamation broadcast by the coupists was prefaced by an attack on former U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge for his role in overthrowing former Premier Ngo Dinh Diem. It also denounced Khanh as a "traitor to the people and the army."

Highlights of the 10-point program were "respect for national prestige" in setting up a form of civilian government, a parallel military role for the army and complete separation of church and state.

Loyal to Viet Pacts

The proclamation speaks of loyalty to Viet Nam's international agreements and "welcomes and accepts the presence of the Americans in helping Viet Nam fight Communism."

The midday coup caught the Americans by surprise.

Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor first learned of it as he drove leisurely along the waterfront after lunch and noticed truck-

loads of Viet Nameese troops—rebels—speeding to take over positions.

He dispatched Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson to confer with Gen. William C. Westmoreland, the U.S. military commander, at U.S. Army headquarters.

Taylor Hopeful

Taylor apparently hoped that Westmoreland, in contact with Khanh and through other U.S. advisers, would be able to contact both the rebels and Khanh's forces and avoid any bloodletting.

The coup also caught the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency off guard. Peer de Silva, CIA chief here, was en route to the Philippines with his family.

Some of the generals involved in today's action are the same who took part in an abortive coup Sept. 13.

The Catholic influence was apparent. Thao is a Catholic and is critical of the increasing Buddhist role in the government.

Call It "a Campaign"

The rebels steered clear of the term "coup," calling their action "a campaign." Their announced aim was to expel Khanh from his post as commander of the armed forces and replace him with Lt. Gen. Tran Thin Khiem, now ambassador in Washington. The said Khiem would be back in Saigon tomorrow to take over leadership of the army.

Khiem, who helped overthrow the military leaders who had toppled the Diem regime, is known to have opposed overthrow

of Diem and the wholesale purge of his collaborators, many of them Catholics. Khiem has ac-

cused Khanh of selling out to the Buddhists.

The effect of the revolt on South Viet Nam's three-day-old civilian government was in doubt, although the rebels claim they are interested mainly in Khanh. At the height of today's activity, Premier Phan-Huy Quat was seen driving through Saigon with his usual military escort.

In one radio statement, the rebels said: "We do not use this campaign for a change in government."

Slips Back From U. S.

But earlier, Thao, asked about the future of the present government, had said: "We'll see about that later."

Rebels claimed that units of marines, the airborne brigade, the infantry, regional forces and the air force and navy took part in the revolt.

Thao, who was shunted to Washington last fall as his embassy's first attache, had slipped back into Viet Nam in December and had gone underground.

On June 14 the Foreign Ministry publicly called on him to give himself up because of continued plotting on behalf of Khiem. He had spent part of his hiding in Saigon, even calling contacts on the telephone, hiding out in the apartment of a friend near the radio station he seized today.

Termed a Contact

Only this week Gen. Thi branded Thao a Viet Cong agent and contact. This charge, while unsubstantiated, goes back to the seven-year war against the French, when Thao headed the Communist Viet Minh intelligence organization in Saigon. Thao denies he is a Communist, but has said he favors the liberation fight.

His brother is a onetime North Viet Nameese ambassador to East Germany, and still lives in North Viet Nam.

The rebels showed signs of planning, unlike the Sept. 13 attempt. Troops had new, unmarked fatigues, and the license numbers and markings had been taken off military vehicles in an attempt to avoid any identification until the objectives were secured.

Security was doubled around all U. S. installations, and U. S. Marines, pistols drawn on their desks, guarded the lobbies.

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